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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000275

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TAGS: PGOV PINS IZ

SUBJECT: IRAQI INTELLECTUALS WANT STRONGMAN, U.S. TO SOLVE MILITIA PROBLEM

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT S. FORD FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On January 28, the MNF-I/Embassy militia working group discussed militias or Extra-Governmental Armed Groups (EGAGs) with members of Iraq's intelligentsia. The Iraqi participants agreed that the GOI has failed to protect its citizens and solve the EGAG problem. Iraq, they asserted, needs a strong leader who can work with MNF-I to maintain order. The main reason Iraq has a problem with EGAGs, they argued, was high unemployment and the CPA decision to disband the Iraqi Army. Kurdish parliamentarian Faeza Babkhan told MNF-I Rep that the GOI leadership should publicly announce that EGAGs are destabilizing Iraq and call on all Iraqis to work together to solve the problem. END SUMMARY.

Strong Leader Wanted

¶2. (C) Ahlam al Jabiri, attorney and Law professor at the Baghdad University College of Law, Faeza Babkhan, PUK TNA member and attorney, Dhuha Ruhi, head of the NGO "Pioneer Women's Group," and Intedhar al Shamiry and Sumaya al Ruba'i, both Economics professors at Al Mustanserya University, discussed EGAGs with POLOFF and MNF-I on January 28. Our contacts lamented the failure of Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and the Iraqi Police (IP) to protect Iraqis from violence. The IP, according to our contacts, cannot even protect themselves, let alone Iraqi citizens. Iraq needs a strong leader, they said, who can work with MNF-I to protect the people. Such a leader must not be beholden to any EGAGs and must be willing to deal with them forcefully, if necessary.

¶3. (C) Our contacts said MNF-I must take a leading role in solving the EGAG problem. The ISF are thoroughly infiltrated by EGAGs such as Badr Corps and Jaysh al Mahdi (JAM) members, and there is widespread suspicion that these EGAGs are loyal to Iran. The ISF are therefore incapable of dealing with EGAGs, according to our contacts. MNF-I must actively help GOI with this issue.

¶4. (C) A strongman is needed soon because the security situation in Iraq is deteriorating, our interlocutors agreed. In addition to well-known EGAGs such as JAM, Badr Corps, and the Peshmerga, smaller EGAGs which amount to no more than common street gangs have formed. In western Iraq Sunni Arabs have formed some small EGAGs because they fear for their safety and do not think the Shia-dominated Ministry of Interior will protect them.

The Reasons Why Militias Exist

15. (C) Our contacts listed high unemployment and the CPA decision to disband the Iraqi Army as main reasons why EGAGs exist. Lack of education and subsequent unemployment are perhaps the most important reasons why young Iraqi men join an EGAG. Many of the EGAG recruits who fall under this category were once members of the Iraqi Army, but are now unemployed due to the CPA decision to disband the Iraqi Army. EGAGs pay their members rather well by Iraqi standards, our interlocutors stated. They also give young men a sense of identity and belonging; feelings which many people get from a job. Indeed, as our contacts point out, once an EGAG member can find a regular job, they often resign from the EGAG.

Admitting the Problem Exists

16. (C) Faeza Babkhan agreed when MNF-I Rep argued that the EGAG problem needs to be addressed publicly by the GOI. GOI leadership must publicly declare that this is a major problem affecting the stability of Iraq, and that all Iraqis must work together on this issue. Only by working together can this problem be solved and peace and stability exist in Iraq.

Comment

17. (C) Despite all the problems with electricity and

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fuel, insecurity remains the biggest preoccupation of our Baghdad contacts. The proliferation of armed gangs and militias is a real public concern. Our contacts were so eager to discuss the militia issue that they addressed the topic immediately; at the beginning of the meeting, they did not even introduce themselves to each other as is customary. They expressed real frustration at the current Iraqi government's inability to provide security to its citizens. Their actions and words underscored their deep desire to solve this problem. Our contacts seemed very sincere when they argued that MNF-I involvement is essential.

KHALILZAD